

# ART OF GOD SYMBOLISM

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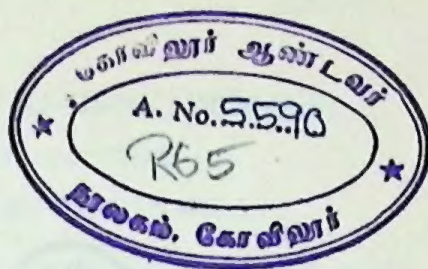
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SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA



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Published by : CENTRAL CHINMAYA MISSION TRUST  
POWAI PARK-DRIVE, BOMBAY 400 072.  
Printed by : Akshar Pratiroop Pvt. Ltd., Bombay 400 031  
for Union Printing Works, Bombay 400 025.

# THE ART OF GOD-SYMBOLISM

## INTRODUCTION

SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

Melody carved in stone is sculpture. Sculpture in melody is music. In colours it becomes painting. Sculptured music, painted in words, is the highest in literature. And this medium of word painting has been chosen by the poet-seer, Vyasa, to describe the Indescribable, in his Puranas.

And there is a definite reason for this choice; the painter in his medium can no doubt, not only express all the details but can also represent movement; but three dimensions alone can he express in his paintings. On the other hand, a sculptured piece of beauty can express all its rhythm of form overflowing from all its sides. The spectator can move around the sculptured piece and enjoy the beauty of it from all angles. But, at the same time, the expression of a piece of sculpture is an arrested moment in life and there is, therefore, no movement in it. Vyasa felt that he needed a medium which has all the beauty and strength of both painting and sculpture with none of the weaknesses of either, in order that he may express and describe the play of the Infinite among the finite objects of the world. In calling our attention to the Unseen Power that supports and moulds the happenings in life, Vyasa searched for a new art of "sculpture-painting" and it is the wielding of this art that we find in all the Puranas: the art of word-painting.

The theme of the Upanishads is too subtle for the average intellect to comprehend and when one is not able to appre-



ciate an ideal one should necessarily fail to apply one's mind to it. Unless the student is capable of clearly visualizing a concept and continuously meditating upon it, he will not be able to experience the highest beauty that has been promised as the achievable final goal in all the scriptures of the world.

In order to help growing children to understand their country, in all educational systems we use maps, and the teacher points out therein the various cities, rivers, mountains etc. But the map is not the country-it serves only to help the student understand the relative positions of various positions of various places and, thereafter, in his own maturity he will realise the glory of his country in all its details. The map is a physical guide for the students' intellectual growth. In the same way, in order to help the seeker comprehend the Infinite Reality and the philosophical concepts of Vedanta, Vyasa, the mighty teacher, felt the need for supplying some conceivable representations and these are provided in the word-pictures and the stories in the Puranas. The word-paintings of this master-poet have succeeded in carving for us solid forms out of the Infinite Truth of the Upanishads and they all live and act and move magnificently across the dark despondencies of the world and meet diligently the despairs of man-made situations. These representative symbols of Truth are conceived as 'deities' and the entire Puranic literature is studded with such blazing picture of dynamic gods and goddesses.

These representations, we find very often, have normal forms, but it is not unusual for Vyasa to take even impossible anatomical features and structures to describe the All-Pervading Essence of the Self; for, the One, Infinite Reality itself has become the world of endless forms and, naturally, therefore, every form in the universe is, in a sense, but a representation of the primeval Truth.

Thus, these Puranic stories were written for the benefit of the early students of Spiritual truth, and, in his pages, the irresistible philosopher and Man of Realisation in Vyasa could not remain permanently hidden. Now and then the mask of the teacher falls off and the theme of the Upanishads unconsciously flows out of his pen. As we read the Puranas we find that the drab description of the man-like deities are enhanced by Vyasa adding effulgent strokes of the Upanishadic concepts to make the gods directly reveal their real essence as the Eternal Soul of the Universe.

This style, called mysticism, is the strain in which the entire Vedas are written. Being a perfect poet, Vyasa's pen sings its songs of mysticism and produces for us the palpitating sculptures of comprehensible god-forms. These become the altars at which a devoted seeker, shattered with his own desires and passions, confused with his despairs and disappointments, crushed beneath his duties and responsibilities, could easily find a haven of peace and consolation.

The criticism that, "though God created Man in His own image, man has, in his turn, ultimately created a God in his own mortal form", is apparently true, but on deeper analysis we shall find that there is not much pith in it. The human mind, in its present state of constant preoccupations is so dense that it cannot directly lift itself to the subtler heights of pure contemplation or sheer meditation. Weighted down with its own attachments and desires for the objects of the world outside, the meditative powers in them are today lying undiscovered and unexplored. The spiritual master must first of all help the seeker to quieten his mind so that he may discover his own meditative faculties. For this purpose the method of Upasana (worship) has been prescribed even in the earliest Vedic literature. The



people of that age worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars, the mountains, the rivers, the rain and the ocean as expressions of this mighty unseen Cause of the Universe.

In the Upanishads, we find very many methods-of-meditation (upasanas) which are all techniques to develop the seeker's powers of concentration, which each student has to practise by bringing his entire thoughts channelized into the given line of contemplation. As time passed on, the population increased and, consequently, the competition for existence became more and more severe. In a competitive society the individual minds get more and more shattered and under such continuous tensions it is difficult for the mind to discover the necessary poise for pursuing the methods of concentration prescribed in the Upanishads. By the time of Yasa, a psychological situation had arisen wherein it was found necessary that the teacher must provide the students with a fresh kind of technique if they were to follow with profit the spiritual exercises. In the Puranas, Vyasa had so successfully inaugurated these new deities and the easier methods of meditating upon them that the Vedic methods fell almost completely into disuse, and in their place the Puranic gods and goddesses got accepted as the most popular altars of worship amongst the Hindus. Herein, I propose to point out the symbolism of a few of the deities most popularly worshipped in the Country.

Nothing has so directly helped the Hindus to feel their common religious bond as the worship of these deities, the most important and popular of them being Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Vishnu, Narayana and Devi. In the Temples of these gods, Hindus of all classes and persuasions visit, mingle together, worship and feel the exhilaration of the Spirit. For centuries these Temples and the common worship of these deities held the Hindu society together, providing a common bond of love and devotion, creating among them a great sense of pride and brotherhood.



The regular study of the Ramayana and the Bhagavad had moulded the emotional and intellectual character of our nation and the millions who are not able to read for themselves the original sacred books, 'heard' constant discourses upon them given out by pandits. Besides, many of these inspiring literature have been translated into the various local languages both in prose and simple songs, so that these deities have contributed a lot in the formation of the Hindu mind and its thoughts.

No doubt, when the Pandits came to merely explain the "Story" without giving the deeper meanings of the text to indicate intelligently the philosophical scriptural import of these mystic-texts and the ideals the personalities stood for, slowly the intelligent and the educated classes fell away from the study sessions of these Puranas. Once the understanding is not full, the faith in the deities got ruined and, consequently the Temples enshrining them became deserted.

To revive a true interest in the Temples we must gain a clearer understanding of what are the significance of these "Divine Representations" and in what way each one of them is suggesting some of the aspects of the Infinite Self within. To students of the Upanishads a few indicative pointers are more than sufficient. I leave them deliberately sketchy-these are not exhaustive. But I am sure, the well-informed mind can explore these enchanting realms of suggestiveness and discover for themselves much more than what we plan to give here under each god-form. In Self-exploration there is a thrill of discovery and a continuous inspiration to search for more and more meaning in each Puranic "Story".





## SHRI GANAPATI-VINAYAKA

SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

Lord Shiva's first son is described as the Supreme Leader (Vinayaka) or as the Leader of the "Ganas" (Ganapati) who attends upon and follows at all times Lord Shiva, or as the Lord of all Obstacles (Vighneswara). These names clearly show that He is a Master of all Circumstances and not even the divine forces can ever obstruct His path. Since He is thus the Lord of all Obstacles, no Hindu ritual or auspicious act is ever undertaken without invoking Him. With His Grace, it is believed that no undertaking can fail due to subjective or objective obstacles.

He is considered as having married both Lakshmi and Saraswati, the Goddesses of Wealth and Knowledge respectively; in short, He is the Master of Knowledge (Vidya) and the champion of wordly achievements (Avidya).

In this characterization Shri Ganapati represents a man or Perfect Wisdom, and a fully-Realized Vedantin. Westerners are shocked to notice that Hindus revere a Divine Form which is so ridiculous and absurd. But the Elephant Headed Lord of all Difficulties in life indeed represents the highest and the best that have ever been given in our Scriptures. To a Vedantic student, since his "path of knowledge" is essentially intellectual, he must have a great head to conceive and understand the logic of the Vedantic thought, and in fact, the truth of Vedanta can be comprehended only through listening to a teacher and, therefore, Sravna (listening) is the initial stage to be mastered by the new



initiate. Therefore, Sri Ganapati has large ears representing continuous and intelligent listening to the teacher.

After "listening" (sravana) to the truths of the Upanishads, Vedantic student must independently "reflect" (manana) upon what he has heard, for which he needs a sensitive intelligence with ample sympathy to discover in himself sufficient accommodation for all living creatures in the universe.

His intellect must have such depth and width in order to embrace in his vision the entire world-of-plurality. Not only must he, in his visualization, embrace the whole cosmos, but he must have the subtle discriminative power (viveka) in him to distinguish the changing, perishable, matter-vestures from the Eternal, Immutable, All-Pervading Consciousness, the Spirit. This discrimination is possible only when the intellect of the student has consciously cultivated this power to a large degree of perfection.

The trunk, coming down the forehead of the elephant-face, has got a peculiar efficiency and beats all achievements of man and his ingenuity in the mechanical and scientific world. Here is a "tool" which can at once uproot a tree or pick up a pin from the ground. The elephant can lift and pull heavy weights with his trunk and, at the same time, it is so sensitive at its tip that the same instrument can be employed by the elephant to pluck a blade of grass. The mechanical instruments cannot have this range of adaptability. The spanner that is used for tightening the bolts of a gigantic wheel cannot be used to repair a lady's watch. Like the elephant's trunk, so should be the perfect discriminative faculty of an evolved intellect so that it can use its discrimination fully in the outer world for resolving gross problems, and at the same time, efficiently employ

its discrimination in the subtle realms of the inner personality layers.

The discriminative power in us can function only where there are two factors to discriminate between; these two factors represent the tusks of the elephant and the trunk growing down between them. Between good and evil, right and wrong, and all the dualities must we discriminate and come to our own judgements and conclusions in life. Sri Vinayaka is represented as having lost one of His tusks in a quarrel with Parasurama, a great disciple of Lord Shiva. This broken tusk indicates that a real Vedantic student of subjective experience is one who has gone beyond the pairs-of-opposites (dwandwaatita).

He has the widest mouth and the largest appetite. In Kubera's Palace, He cured Kubera's vanity that in his riches he had become the 'Treasurer of the Heavens'. When Kubera offered Him a dinner He ate all the food that was prepared for the entire guests. Thereafter, He started eating the utensils and then the decorative pandal, and still He was not satisfied. Then his father, Lord Shiva, approached Him and gave Him a handful of "puffed rice" to eat. Eating this he became satisfied.

The above story narrated in the Puranas, is very significant that a Man of Perfection has an endless appetite for life—he lives in the Consciousness and to him every experience, good or bad, is only a play of the Infinite through him, Lord Shiva, the Teacher, alone can satisfy the hungers of such sincere students by giving them a handful of "roasted rice", representing fried-seeds, indicating the "baked vasa-nas", burnt in the Fire of Knowledge. When one's vasa-nas are burnt up, the inordinate enthusiasm of experiencing life is also whetted.

A Man of Perfection must have a big belly to stomach peacefully, as it were, all the experience of life, auspicious and inauspicious.

When such a Mastermind sits dangling his foot down, it is again significant, in the symbolism of the Puranas. Generally we move about in the world through the corridors of our experiences on our two feet, or the inner subtle body, the mind and the intellect. A Perfect man of Wisdom has integrated them both to such an extent that they have become in him as One—an intellect into which the mind has folded and has become completely subservient.

At such a great Yogi's feet are the endless eatables of life—meaning, the enjoyable glories of physical existence. All powers come to serve Him, the entire world of cosmic forces are, thereafter, His obedient servants, seeking their shelter at His feet; the whole world and its environment is waiting at His feet for His pleasure and command.

In the representation of Sri Vinayaka we always find a mouse sitting in the midst of the beautiful, fragrant ready-made food, but if you observe closely, you will find that the poor mouse is sitting looking up at the Lord, shivering with anticipation, but not daring to touch anything without His command. And now and then He allows the mouse to eat.

A mouse is a small little animal with tiny teeth, and yet, in a barn of grain a solitary mouse can bring disastrous losses by continuously gnawing and nibbling at the grain. Similarly, there is a "mouse" within each personality which can eat away even a mountain of merit in us, and this mouse is the power of desire. The Man of Perfection is one who has so perfectly mastered this urge to acquire, possess and



enjoy, this self-annihilating power of desire, that it is completely held in obedience to the will of the Master. And yet, when the Master wants to play His part in blessing the world He rides upon the mouse-meaning it is a desire to do service to the world that becomes His vehicle to move about and act.

The Puranas tell us how once Sri Vighneswara, while riding His mouse, was thrown down and it looked so ridiculous that the Moon laughed at the comic sight. It is said in the Puranas that the great-bellied Lord Vinayaka looked at the Moon and cursed that nobody would everlook at the Moon on that day-the Vinayaka Chathurthi.

When a man of Perfection (Vinayaka) moves about in the world, riding on His insignificant-looking vehicle, the "desire" to serve (mouse), the gross intellects of the world (Moon the presiding Deity of the Intellect) would be tempted to laugh at such prophets and seers.

The Lord of Obstacles, Sri Vighneswara, has four arms representing the four-inner-equipments (antahkarana). In one hand He has a Rope, in another an Axe. With the Axe, He cuts off the attachments of His devotees to the world-of-plurality and thus ends all the consequent sorrows, and with the Rope, pulls them nearer and nearer to the Truth, and ultimately ties them down to the Highest Goal. In his third hand He holds a rice ball (modaka), representing the reward of the joys of sadhana which He gives His devotees. With the other hand He blesses all His devotees and protects them from all obstacles on their Spiritual Path of seeking the supreme.

On the spiritual pilgrimage, all the obstacles are created by the very subjective and objective worlds in the seeker

himself; his attachment to the world of objects, emotions and thoughts, are alone his obstacles. Sri Vighneswara chops them off with an Axe and holds the attention of the seeker constantly towards the Higher with the Rope that He has in His left hand. Enroute He feeds the seeker with modaka (the joy of satisfaction experienced by the evolving seeker of Reality) and blesses him continuously with greater and greater progress, until at last the Man of Perfection becomes Himself the Lord of Obstacles, Sri Vighneswara.

The above three or four examples should clearly bring to your mind the art employed by Vyasa in his mystical word paintings. It must be evidently clear to all sensitive thinkers that the representations given in the various symbolisms are not as many different Deities, but that they are vivid pen-portraits of the subjective Truth described in the Upanishadic lore. The student must have the subtle sensitivity of a poet, the ruthless intellect of a scientist, and the soft heart of the beloved, in order to enter into the enchanted realm of mysticism created by the poet-seer, Vyasa. To the crude intellect and its gross understanding, these may look ridiculous; but art can be fully appreciated only by hearts that have art in them. With at least a cursory knowledge of Vedanta, when we review the Puranas they cannot but strike us as extremely noisy with the clamouring echoes of the Upanishadic melody.

## VISHNU

Vedanta analyses the human being and declares the pure Consciousness to be the core of his personality, which manifests through his body, mind and intellect as perceiver-feeler-thinker and experiences the world of objects, emotions and thoughts. The Consciousness, functioning as the Spark of Existence in living beings is the one eternal Reality which is the substratum of the entire Cosmos as well. This Supreme Reality, which pervades the microcosm and the macrocosm, is described by the sage Vyasa in his Vishnu Purana as the Lord Vishnu.

Vishnu is shown as in yogic-sleep (yoga-nidra), in an ocean of milk (ksheerabddhi), on a great serpent (Ananta), which has its body coiled up to form His bed. The serpent has a thousand heads and its hood is turned inward looking at its own coiled body. Lakshmi, the consrot of the Lord, sits at His feet, serving Him.

Vishnu (Narayana) represents the pure Consciousness deep within one's personality, beyond the five layers of matter viz, the Food, Vital Air, Mental, Intellectual and the Bliss Sheaths. This picture of Narayana lying on the serpent bed in the milky ocean, suggests ways and means of recognizing Him as the Consciousness in the innermost recesses of one's own heart.

The ocean of milk, in which Narayana rests, represents the purity of one's bosom. White colour represents nobility and purity. The whiteness of the milk indicates one's sattwic (noble and pure) tendencies or qualities. The ser-





pent is the mind and its thousand heads represent the infinite variety of thoughts that the mind entertains. When a serpent comes into contact with its victim, it injects poison from its fangs into the body of its victim. If, however, the serpent remains coiled up around itself, There is no letting out of the poison. So too, when man's mind is extrovert i.e. seeking the world of objects, it develops ego and egocentric deseries, which veil the divine Self in him. On the other hand, when a sattwic (pure) mind turns its attention inward i.e. towards the Self, it develops a tranquility whereby there is no longer any desires or passions arising within him.

The thousand heads of the coiled up serpent are all turned inwards to indicate that the thoughts in a tranquil mind are directed to single pointed meditation upon the Self, the Reality. If such meditation is prolonged in a pure, sattwic attitude (ocean of milk), the meditator locates therein the Infinite Reality, Vishnu.

The Lord is shown to be in yogic-sleep. It means that the Realised One, who has reached the state of pure Consciousness, is no longer aware of the pluralistic phenomena of perceptions, emotions and thoughts. He has awakened to the Infinite, All-Pervading Reality and He seems to be asleep so far as the terrestrial world is concerned. Hence, it is called yoga-nidra (yogic-sleep). Yoga, derived from the root yuj (to join), indicates that He is attuned to the Infinite Reality: 'Nidra' means sleep and it indicates his transcendence to the Infinite, from the finite realm of experience of the limited man.

As Narayana is thus lying down on the body of the serpent, Ananta, His consort Lakshmi, sits at His feet and serves Him. Lakshmi symbolizes wealth, power and glory. A Man-of-Realization, who, through meditation has thus experienced the Highest, is disinterested in the world of objects and achievements. Nevertheless, wealth, power and

glory follow him and remain always at his feet. He may use them or reject them without the least thought, because he is ever rooted and revelling in the Supreme Truth.

Vishnu is the eternal Infinite Reality. The manifested world of plurality, which man experiences, has emerged from this unmanifest Reality. To indicate this, Brahmaji, the Creator is described as being born from the navel (Nabhi) of Vishnu. The navel portion represents the psychological centre (chakra) from where sound originates in the form of Para Vak (transcendent speech). This inaudible sound passes through two more stages of development viz. Pashyanti and Madhyama before it becomes audible gross speech called Vaikhari. This audible sound is the quality of space (akash), which is the first of the five elements that constitute the entire universe. The production of sound, therefore, symbolises creation. This idea is illustrated by Brahma emerging from the navel of Vishnu.

VISHNU is one of the Gods of the Trinity. He represents the power of sustenance. In order to maintain anything in life, one must have the means to do so. An earning member alone can maintain his family. This idea is indicated by the marriage of Vishnu with Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. Unless Vishnu is associated with wealth, how can there be proper maintenance of the created world? In terms of esoteric philosophy, Lakshmi stands for spiritual wealth and auspiciousness.

Vishnu is shown blue in colour and clothed in yellow. He wears a crown and stands upon a lotus. He has four hands and He holds in them a conch (Sankha), a discus (chakra), a mace (gada) and a lotus (padma). All these are significant symbols which are employed to indicate that Vishnu is none other than the Supreme Self—the Changeless Reality around which all the terrestrial changes take place—the Imperishable Essence in the perishable world.



The blue colour of Vishnu indicates His Infinite Stature. Blue colour is associated with the Infinite since, immeasurable entities like the cloudless sky or the deep ocean appear blue in colour. Yellow represents the earth for two reasons viz (i) earth (silica) glows with a yellow fire when introduced in a colourless flame, (ii) anything that is buried in the earth for a long period of time gathers a yellowish colour. Vishnu, who is blue in colour and clothed in yellow, therefore represents the descent of the Infinite, Immeasurable, Transcendental Truth to the terrestrial realm i.e. the earth. In otherwords, Vishnu is the Infinite manifesting Himself in a finite form.

When the Infinite expresses through a finite form, there is a manifestation of an individual (jeeva). The individual comes in contact with and reacts to the world with the help of four subtle equipments in him. They are the four constituents of his Subtle Body, viz. the mind (manas), the intellect (buddhi), the ego (ahankar) and the conditioned-consciousness (chitta). The four hands of Vishnu represent these four equipments.

The crown on Vishnu's head signifies His supreme sovereignty and Lordship over the entire world of plurality. He is the one who maintains and protects all things and beings in the entire universe.

The deity stands upon a lotus. Lotus represents the Truth. 'Standing upon the lotus', therefore means that the ground or substratum which supports a Man-of Perfection is the Brahman i.e. a Man-of-Perfection is ever rooted in the Supreme Truth.

In one of His four hands, Vishnu carries a lotus. The lotus indicates the final goal of human evolution. Vishnu invites mankind to reach this goal of Perfection which is the pure Self within. The Lord blows His conch (sankha) calling mankind to live the higher and nobler values of life so that

they may turn their attention away from their preoccupations with the material world and realise the Self within. This call is the whisperings of the inner conscience which advises man to give up his sensuous appetites and extrovert living and seek the Eternal Reality. But man does not hear this sacred-voice within. He continues with his passionate living until at last he gets knocked down by disappointment and dissatisfaction with life as such. This 'knocking down' is also done by the kindly hand of the Lord using His mace (gada). If man, despite the growing sense of restlessness and agitations in his bosom, still persists in his sensual indulgence and does not turn towards the spiritual path, the Lord uses his annihilating power of the discuss (chakra). The discuss is meant to destroy man's present equipment so that he may start afresh with better equipment and in a more appropriate and conducive environment for seeking the Truth.

The above is true not only with reference to an individual but to a community or a nation as well. As long as people do not heed the sacred advice of the Scriptures and take to the spiritual values of life, they meet with troubles and tribulations of life. If this warning also is not heeded and the people continue to live extrovertedly, fulfilling merely their sense gratifications, they are bound to meet with utter-disaster and death. This is what history has been recording from generation to generation by the rise and fall of cultures and civilizations of nations.

On the other hand, a seeker who listens to the call from within and follows the spiritual path leading to the Truth, does not experience the knocks of the mace or the destruction by the discuss. He lives a life of contentment and bliss until he reaches the sacred Abode of Truth and becomes one with Vishnu.

(Courtsey—T.P.)



## RAMA

The personality of Lord Rama in the Ramayana stands out unique and the most glorious as compared to any other character described in the scriptural literature. The great sage, Valmiki, has, in his creation of this divine hero, symbolised in Him the ideal of uncompromising goodness. Nowhere else does one find such idealistic perfections in all walks of life, combined in a single individual. Thus Rama was, at once, a perfect son, ideal king, a true husband, a real friend, a devoted brother, a noble enemy and so on.

Different aspects of the human personality, functioning in diverse facets to life, have been separately projected, and in Sree Rama an achievable perfection is indicated in each aspect. While attempting to paint an ideal picture of each aspect of Lord's personality, the Rishi (sage) would not compromise with the standards of perfection conceived by him. He highlights one aspect of the personality at the expense of the others, so that Rama's conduct and behaviour, in certain instances, appear to be inconsistent with His divine character. Such seeming inconsistencies have created misapprehensions among the students of Ramayana because their deeper inner significance has been lost sight of.

One such instance is the criticism levelled against Rama for leaving his father, King Dasaratha, and going away to the jungle while Dasaratha was severely protesting and Rama Himself knew that His father would not survive the sorrows of his son's self-exile. This criticism has no bearing when one bears in mind that Rama was only playing the





part of an ideal son. In order to emphasize perfection in a son, the sage Valmiki provided an exaggerated environment and situation and yet made Rama take this decision. Consider: it was the eve of Rama's coronation Rama himself owed a duty to the subjects who were clamouring for His coronation then comes the insane demand of his step-mother, Kaikeyi, to crown younger brother, Bharatha, and to send Rama into exile. The boundless love that King Dasaratha and Rama bore for each other is brought out exquisitely vivid and clear. Yet in spite of all these, Rama would not compromise in the fulfilment of His duty as a son. His father had promised a boon to fulfil the demand of Kaikeyi, and the son's duty was to see that his father's promise was redeemed notwithstanding the series of obstacles that confronted him as the son of Dasaratha.

Another common doubt and dissatisfaction among the critics of Ramayana is with regard to Rama's action in exiling his queen Sita, to the forest in response to the irresponsible prattle of a washerman, questioning the purity of the queen. Here again, the ideal kingship in Rama is magnified almost to the ugliness of an absurdity. A true King, in those days, was one who was accepted by all his subjects, unlike the present system of democracy which is but the rule of the majority. Hence, when Rama found even a single dissenting note in the voice of the public, he made the greatest sacrifice in sending His queen away. This action of Rama, though would appear a absurd by the modern standards, portrays the sanctity Rama attached to the accepted standards of ideal kingship of his days.

It is interesting to observe that this kingly action of voluntarily sending Sita away to the jungle was even surpassed by the deep devotion and concern displayed by Rama as the ideal husband, when Sita was carried away by Ravana.

From that very moment of her abduction, Rama put forth his super human effort to regain his lost wife. Here Rama provides the ideal picture of an illustrious husband.

Above all, the most criticized portion of the entire Ramayana is the apparent cowardice of the great hero Rama in having hidden himself behind a tree and shot the monkey-king Vali, while the latter was engaged in a fight with his brother, Sugreeva. Here again, Rama was only demonstrating his ideal friendship with Sugreeva. Once a friend, He was always a friend. He would go to the extreme limit and do anything to help a true friend. Besides this, the episode has also a deeper mystical significance.

Vali, the immoral and vicious brother represents lust, the lower nature of man. Sugreeva, the moral and virtuous brother represents man's higher and nobler nature. The story goes that Vali had earned, through tapas (austerity) a boon by which half the strength of his enemy was transferred to him as soon as an enemy confronted him in a battle. Similarly, the power of lust becomes invulnerable the moment man comes in direct contact with the object of lust. The sense objects overpower man and they leave him a helpless victim of temptation. To avoid this, and to overcome successfully the disastrous influence of the sense objects, man has to stay away physically from the objects in the initial stages, i.e. before he gains an absolute hold and control over them. So long as man remains in the midst of sense objects and tries to exercise his self control over those objects, he can never be successful since the power of the sense objects is almost invincible. To indicate this great truth Rama is described as hiding behind a tree, i.e. physically keeping away from Vali, and shooting him from a distance.

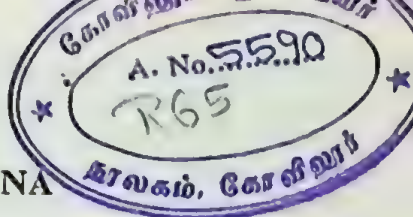
The character of Rama paints the picture of a Man-of-Perfection. He was also an ideal brother, a perfect and chivalrous enemy and so on - thus every aspect of his personality is idealised to absolute perfection.

A peculiarity noticed in the personality of Lord Rama is that he is seen to be carrying his bow and arrows at all times. The wielding of the bow and arrows symbolizes his preparedness and strength to maintain peace and justice both within and without. Disturbances may arise within one's own bosom or reach him from the external world. Rama is ever prepared to face such challenges with strength. He is the ideal of 'aggressive goodness' as opposed to 'weak and passive goodness'. He would not passively accept anything that is inconsistent with or contrary to morality and righteousness. He stands for righteousness and opposes and destroys all that is unrighteous.

Thus, one finds in the Ramayana a necklace of priceless gems, each gem dazzling with the divine brilliance of the ideal personality of Lord Rama.







## KRISHNA SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

This is a sacred day dedicated to Lord Krishna. For centuries together, the story of Krishna has been repeated on this day in our country. Krishna was born on this day in Mathura and we are inspired by the story year after year. Later, Krishna married several wives and perhaps divorced some. Thus we have brought Him down to our own level and think that we are not as bad as Krishna. This was the ideal for a very long time. Perhaps this is the superficial meaning of the story and it has become a slogan for the cheap missionaries to be blasphemous on Hinduism.

The significance of this story is very great. Hinduism accepts no history to be worth remembering. All history which Hinduism accepts is only His Story. This History is clouded in mystery, for it is but My-story. Actually there is no mystery in History. Everything is so very scientific and logical. The seeming mystery has been explained to be always My-story. Because He is Me and I am He. "The Son and the Father are one", says the Bible. Thus from History it happens to be, on enquiry, a revelation of my story. It gives a straight answer to the question "Who am I?"

When Vyasa wrote the Puranas, he was not writing any story of Krishna. We do not want any story in the Puranas. Vyasa wrote not for the sake of mere writing. He was a great student of Knowledge, a master of the Vedas. He was a realised Soul. He compiled the Vedas into four parts and then wrote the Brahma—Sutras. These were not

useful to the ordinary folk. They could not comprehend the power behind the body, mind and intellect which gave these the glow-of-life. So he wrote a figurative narration in the form of the Puranas. Thus from birth to death, the narration of Krishna was not a story.

There is a Higher Power pulsating in us. It is the Light of Intelligence. It illumines the thought and feelings in us. 'I am happy' 'I am aware of ideas'. The Light illuminating all these faculties, is one and the same in all. It is represent as Sri Krishna. Krishna is Infinite Wisdom. He came forth for the first time in the world in the thick jungles of the Himalayas. He was born in the prison. That prison is the bosom of the Rishis, who were contemplating on the mysterious problem of Life. We know that scientific Truths are discovered in the quiet caves of the rare Intellectuals. Rishis were contemplating on the great Goal of Life' the Purpose of Life. Man is not born to die away as the donkey or the pig. Man has a better purpose in life. The Rishis in the quiet silence of the Himalayas rediscovered the Truth.

Krishna is Truth. He was born in the quiet heart-caves of the Rishis. Those Rishis gradually transmitted their knowledge to their disciples. Thus Krishna was removed from the prison to Yasoda's house—the disciple's heart. There is no pain in this unique delivery. The Guru gives the child without the agony of labour pains. While we are sleeping in fatigue and exhaustion, wearied in production and destruction, we know not, that there is born a baby, called Knowledge-Krishna-in our bosom. Engaged perpetually in procuring, keeping and spending, we are fatigued; then in the deep sleep of midnight, the child is born. The senses are the gatekeepers who slept-off when Krishna was born in the prison.

As long as we are engaged in those outer activities, the scriptures do not open their secrets to us. When we get fed up with these and go to sleep to forget them, in meditation, this child is born. When we have fully enjoyed life in all aspects and find no peace out of them-in that quiet sleep, the maturity of understanding, the Light dawns. The Scriptures are taught to such a heart.

To-day, a young man is not satisfied with mere theories. He wants a rational reply. The Bible cannot be questioned. To question it becomes blasphemy. The west cannot understand the logic and so the West is unhappy. Until the war came, they were satisfied with their material advancements and the general hoarding, maintained and expanded by bombs and superbombs. Now Materialism has broken down. There is plenty of wealth but there is no peace. Achievement is there, but no delight in those joys. Wars have come and gone, but peace has not come. The war-mongers are more happy than the peace lovers.

Western thought is ransacked by all these contradictions. A French philosopher expressed his realisation that behind all these struggles, there is an Infinite Reality which he could not comprehend. He has summed it up, that there is a great Power behind all these conflicts, something beyond. The Intellect cannot understand and bring it to scientific apprehension. The Intellect cannot reach there-it is like a dark screen. We cannot penetrate it. Trying to probe beyond it is like a tiny mosquito attempting to crash into a rocky fort by repeated head-long attacks. So there is a screen between man and the Infinite, and man thus thinks he is insignificant.

But in spite of misery and sorrow, pangs and struggles, if he fights, toils hard, he will push himself forward. He

can reach Him. In and through life he can enjoy His smile. The West could not penetrate this darkness, The body, mind and intellect cannot penetrate the darkness. That darkness is this night of Krishna's birth. When everybody is sleeping in the prison of his Ego, when the sense organs are all asleep, the mysterious Light shines forth during meditation, and in that darkness the Blue-Boy of Brindavan is born.

He was first born in the hearts of the Rishis. They brought him to Yasoda, in you and me. The Scriptures are that little baby. The Light of Krishna, then, comes to us. Yasoda looks after that child-baby, the Blue Boy. She thinks it is her own child because he was supposed to be born to her while she was asleep. Material prosperity terminates into spiritual progress. The pursuit of material life and seneuous attachments is transformed.

We have to look after that Baby. It is not an easy job, with a mischievous baby. From minute to minute he steals from the house and also from the neighbouring houses. When Yasoda wants to punish him, his very looks make her forget her own intentions. Everything she forgets. The Gopis may complain again and again, but nothing can be done. A thousand worries, a thousand shames the mother bears for his acts, but she cannot punish Him. Try any number of times we too cannot control Him. We too are deceived by His looks.

We have left the picture house on this holiday for the sake of Spiritual Knowledge. Once, if in His Light we are working, there is joy, and happiness increases. This is the second stage. We become firmly established with Krishna. We look after Him in all aspects; with body, mind and intellect. He illumines and helps us. We need not help Him.



When the third stage comes-we study the Sastras. We are convinced. Then the city of Dwaraka is constructed. After Sravana and Manana, we rise above the heart and try to meditate. Thus the Blue Boy of Dwaraka is the Lord of Consciousness in the Heart. He is building a house in my heart. The Lord in the pooja room is in my heart. The Light of Consciousness in me is He. What I perceive is due to the Light. That is the Dwaraka Krishna. Krishna born in the jail, is the birth of Knowledge in the heart of the Rishis. They explained it to their disciples. The Leela of Krishna are the Spiritual activities in us, the Realisation of the Self.

Fulfilment is here and now; to serve the humanity, to generate a revival movement, The virtues of the Hindu culture are brought out in the story of the Mahabharata war. Krishna guided the war, whether it was good or bad. He did not take up any weapon. Appearance (Avatar) is only the Life of Construction in true Cultural values, and disappearance (Tirodhanam) is the gradual diminution to the Life of Knowledge. After rediscovery we become the hope of the age. The nation can be led to a greater momentum, the culture of the Rishis.

Hinduism is accused of too much introvertedness. But really it is only Realisation. There is no religion that preaches complete extrovertedness. Christians kneel down with eyes open and pray to the Lord Yonder. The Hindus close their eyes and meditate upon the Lord within. They are supposed to forget the world and its worries.

It is only a wrong reading of the picture from an uncomfortable distance. If the picture is looked at correctly we understand that the Rishis see the Scriptures in the temple of their hearts. They do not close their eyes. The foreigner's

view is hasty, shortsighted and perverted. The Rishis do not close their eyes fully. It remains only half-closed. Their steady mind looks out, It is called Shambavee Mudra. They are fully conscious of their within and without. They know that the light they see outside is the reflection of the Light of Consciousness shining from inside. The Infinite and finite are one and the same for them. Peace and harmony reign in them. Their eyes are never fully closed. They are not fully introvert to the detriment of the outer world and its progress.

Krishna was born in the secret prison. When He was brought out He was delivered to Yasoda. When He has grown up sufficiently he went to Dwaraka. There He established order. Then He went to Hastinapura. In the battle of Kurukshetra He gave out his wisdom to bless the nation. When you have developed a good faculty, you do not enjoy it yourself, but give it back, improved, to the society. Thus, Krishna also gave out to the society the Knowledge of the Geeta.

The history of the cultural beauty of a society is in waves of Darkness and Brightness. These waves of cultural history can be traced from creation. If the symbolic Krishna has failed, it means the cultural beauty is lost. This power is in every one of us. It is for us to make it bright. To invoke Him is only to claim Him. "He alone gains Him, who chooses Him".

To-day is a wonderful day. The Lord is coming, so people fast. Devaki is in pains, therefore you do not eat food. Fasting is Upasana i.e., to live near the Lord (Upa-asanam). Attunement to the Lord through meditation is fasting. While contemplating, it is an agony to eat. For intellectual work, eating food and indulgence in the world outside is detri-

mental-for Krishna's birth is Enlightenment. Food means satisfaction for the senses. Starve the senses. Uplift them to contemplation. The thick darkness has come. Be brave. Light will dawn. There must be no fear. The Sun has dawned in our bosom. Thus we turn inward in meditation. In that silence of the heart, in spite of thunders, we must remain sufficiently long. Then only, in that long-earned tranquility will we experience, the Birth of Krishna, The Light.







# SARASWATI

## GODDESS OF LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

### SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

It is a Vedic tradition that in India, from the very dawn of history, we have been respecting women to such an extent that our greatest scriptures are today called "Mother" Sruti. Thus, the Goddess of Learning is represented in Hinduism as a feminine diety and She is called Shri Saraswati—She who gives the essence (sara) of our own Self (swa).

The Mother of Learning is represented as sitting on a lotus because the Upanishads declare that a teacher who can teach the Reality must be himself well-established in the experience of the Real. Sitting upon the Supreme Reality, the mother holds the sacred Scriptures in one hand and with the Lord's-conch-arm and the mace-arm-representing the mind and the intellect—She handles the Indian Lute (Veena) and sings the enchanting melody of Truth as contained in the book of Upanishads (Sruti) and as experienced by Her in Her own bosom. Srotriyam (one who knows the philosophy of the Upanishads well) and Brahmanishtam (one who is well-established in the subjective experience of the Self)—these two are the qualities of a true teacher.

In short, She represents not merely a Man of Realisation in Samadhi, but a true teacher who plays his knowledge upon the heartstrings of his disciples. She gathers the instrument, tunes up its strings properly and starts singing upon it. Soon the wafting music enchants othres to approach Her

feet to learn the music and to produce the same celestial melody by themselves.

She is wedded to the Creator (Brahmaji) which is very appropriate indeed, in as much as the Ceator would be certainly helpless if He did not have the knowledge of what He had to create. All creative endeavours must spring forth and can sustain themselves only with knowledge of what to create and how to create them.

This is the reason why in the nine days of Devi-Pooja we have in the first three days, invocation of Shri Kali (Durga), the second set of three days we invoke Shri Lakshmi, and then the concluding three days we worship Goddess Saraswati. Kali is the mighty power of destruction invoked so that the seeker can destroy all his negative tendencies in himself. Thereafter, Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, is invoked to cultivate the nobler emotions and sentiments in him-the inner wealth of his heart. One who has thus accomplished the cleansing of one's inner personality alone can with sure success worship Shri Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning.

The study of the Upanishads is futile and cannot bring about any spiritual awakening in the one who has not made his heart pure. One must weed out the false values of desire, lust and passion and must cultivate love, charity, self-control and the other virtues. When one has thus invoked Kali and has adored Lakshmi, one is fit to enter the Temple of Shri Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning.

When such a mature student, properly prepared, comes to listen to the Songs of Mother Saraswati, he not only understands Her (Scripture) Divine Music, but also he comes to comprehend and experience that the Self in him is the Self everywhere. To experience this Eternal Oneness is the acme

of peace and perfection--the State of Godhood, the Realm of Pure Consciousness. Reaching this State Divine, the Upanishads declare that "there is no return", there is no chance to fall back into the earlier misconceptions arising from the body-mind-intellect identifications.

This State of Perfect Freedom from the little Ego and the rediscovery of the Supreme Self, the large Divine Personality within us is called liberation (moksha). This--the Supreme Reward for a life of intelligent self-control (tapas), deep study (swadhyaya), continuous reflection (manan), and steady meditation (nidhidhyan)--is symbolized in the Lotus that the Lady of Learning holds in her fourth hand.

The Divine Book is in Her Chit-hand, her Veena is in her Manas and Her Buddhihands, and the Lotus is in Her Ahamkara-hand. When the truths of the Upanishads are brought to our Constant-Awareness, and when our mind and intellect, through a silent self-discussion within ourselves (manan), sing the Song of the Self in our reflections, the Wisdom born of experience floods our being (Lotus), lifting the dreary darkness of ignorance.

The kindly Lady of Wisdom is Mother Sruti, Shri Saraswati. She leads us to the end of our slavery to the devil in us, the passions and lusts. This is symbolized in the burning of the effigy of the lower-nature, on the tenth day of Durga Puja, called Dassera. This day is also called the Day-of-Enlightenment--Vidyarambha.

May the Blessings of Saraswati be ever upon our hearts, lips, and pens.







## SHIVA - NATARAJA

Smt. MRINALINI SARABHAI

Symbols in Indian civilization have always been powerful representations of the higher reality. The principle has been understood by its support on our plane of existence of its symbolical counterpart. The link between the worlds, the outer and inner, the higher and the lower, is through the language of symbols. How else can a reality where 'sight cannot go, nor the mind, where we cannot know, we cannot understand'-something 'other than all that is known' be comprehended?

The dance has been one of the most powerful vehicles for this representation and the dancer is fortunate that through her entire being, she is an expression of Infinity. The images of our deities each manifest in their visible structures, one particular aspect of the world. But the genius of Indian thought found a marvellous unity of science, art and religious fervour in the sculpture of the Dancing Shiva, Nataraja, Lord of the Dance.

Whenever, as a dancer, we speak in the language of the dance of Nataraja, infinite are the possibilities that cross our minds, with the realization that Nataraja imparts wisdom constantly, through this famous pose that has been immortalised by the master carvers of Southern India.

The deep significance underlying this image should be clearly understood-not only because this symbol has been

alive for six thousand years-but because the message is still significant today.

The upper right hand holds aloft the damaru, representing Nada, the sound, the evolution of the universe. From sound came all language, all music, all knowledge. The shape of the drum, with its two triangles, tells us of nature and energy which combine together for all creation. The upper left hand in the half moon gesture, holds a tongue of flame.

Why does Shiva hold the hope of creation in one hand, and the flame, the fire that destroys, in the other? For, creation and destruction are the counterparts of His own Being. They are the two aspects of our life, for as we are surely born, so do we surely die. What then is the answer? The right hand, held in front, in the wondrous gesture of protection and peace, tells us, 'Look' for God's grace is ever with you.'

Whether it be Shiva or Krishna, Buddha or Christ, every manifestation of the Supreme, uses this hasta called Abhaya Hasta in the language of the dance. But let us go on questioning. 'How can we attain that grace, how may we be forever in Thy care?' The left hand points the way. It lies across the body, directing the gaze to the foot. The hand is in the gaja hasta, the sign of the elephant hand. This is the hand movement depicting the trunk of the elephant and herein is a still deeper meaning. The trunk is discriminating. It can pick up and break the heaviest of objects, as well as handle the most delicate. It can choose between the two. So too, should we choose between the higher and the lower, and be discriminating. And to help us, he who owns the trunk, Ganesh-remover of all obstacles, is ever present.

The left foot is raised, telling man that as the dancer raises his foot, so can man raise himself and attain salvation. While one foot is raised, the right foot, upon which balances the whole body of the universe, that which at this eternal moment of dance, precariously balances the fate of the world, that foot is not on the firm ground, but upon the body of a struggling dwarf, a man who is the embodiment of all that veils truth from falsehood, the *apasmara purusha*, made up of ignorance and forgetfulness. This is the *purusha* within us, which prevents us from realising our own essential divinity. It is for us to firmly crush out the ignorance if we are to attain the supreme joy which is our true nature, the eternal bliss that man calls God. Around Nataraja, is a ring of flames, the *prabha mandala*, the dance of nature all initiated by the Self in the centre, all emanating from Him, and all dissolving within Him.

While Shiva dances, His matted locks hold the sacred river Ganga, the power and the source of all movement in life, with its waters that purify mankind and the crescent moon delicate as a new-born babe with its promise of life in all its radiance and glory.

What is perhaps most significant of all in the image is the combination of this God ascetic the solitary One, master of meditation, with the frenzied dance—the Yogi and the artist. A dancer becomes the being that he impersonates on the stage. In the dance are aroused the entire energy of body, mind, intellect and soul. It is a complete surrender to God. Thus, a dancer is similar to the Yogi, who gives his all to the Lord.

This is a dramatic and vivid comparison. But look at the face of Nataraja in the sculpture. It is serene, the epitome of inward absorption. While the body moves in a

frenzy, like the world with its tumult, Shiva Himself, is undisturbed by the activity, depicting most wonderfully the mortal life and the Divine Self. His face, calm and immobile, is a spectator in the external play of His own creative impulse—While He teaches, His eternal Self remains apart, watchful and tender. It is the secret of life open to us all to read, so magnificently portrayed in this masterpiece of sculpture. A seeker of the truth, need search no further for a symbol of the highest Reality. He only needs to look with eyes that see.







## THE PRANAVA - OM

SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

Of all the *Mantras*, the most powerful and the significant one is the single-syllabled incantation called the Pranava. This is the 'OM'.

The available literature upon the significances of these Vedic *Mantras* is almost voluminous. Nowhere in this world can we meet with a more sacred symbol that has got such a vast amount of significance.

From vedic times until the present day the word (OM' has been taken as a symbol and as an aid to meditation by spiritual aspirants. It is accepted both as one with Brahman and as the medium, the Logos, connecting man and God. The entire history of the syllable is in the revelations of the Vedas and in the declarations of the Upanishads, and this history in the hands of the later philosophers developed into what came to be known as the *Sphota-vada* or the philosophy of the word. The perceptible universe is the form, behind which stands the eternal inexpressible, the Sphota, manifested as Logos, or Word. This Eternal Sphota, the essential material basis for all ideas or names, is the power through which God creates the Univorse. Iswara—the Brahman conditioned by Maya—first manifests Himself as the Sphota, the inexpressible word, out of which He evolves as the concrete, sensible world.

There is a verse in the Vedas: "Prajapati vai idam agro asect" (In the beginning was Prajapati, the Brahman):

"Tasya vag dvitiya aseet" (With whom was the Word):  
"Vag vai paramam Brahma" (And the Word was verily the Supreme Brahman). The idea belongs to Hindiusm and in the fourth Gospel of the New Testament we read it repeated; "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." This Sphota has its symbol in the word 'OM'. Thus, in the 'Maitrayana Upanishad' after it has been said that there is one Brahman without words, and a second, a Word-Brahman, we are told that the word is the syllable 'OM'. The sound of 'OM' is also called 'Pranava', meaning that it is something that pervades life, or runs through prana or breath.

The very central theme of 'Mandukya Upanishad' is the syllable 'OM' through which the mystery of Brahman is gathered to a point. The text of this Upanishad first treats 'OM' in terms of the Upanishadic doctrines of the three states of waking, dream and sleep, but then passes on to the 'fourth' (*Turiya*) thus transporting us beyond the typical Upanishadic sphere into that of the later "classic-Advaita-Vedanta". Speaking of 'OM', Taittiriya Upanishad says: "Thou art the sheath of Brahman". That is, 'OM' is the container for the Supreme and, therefore, invoking 'OM' is invoking the Supreme.

In every piece of music there are three aspects, viz (1) the meaning of the song; (2) the laws of music and (3) the sound of the song. Similarly, in 'OM' there are three aspects. The first is the mere sound, the mere mantra as pronounced by the mouth; the second is the meaning of the syllable, which is to be realized through feeling; and the third is the application of 'OM' to your character, singing it in your acts and so through your life.

"OM" represents the Self, which is the Supreme Non-dual Reality. The Self is known in four states, namely, the

waking-state, the dream-state, the deep-sleep-state and the fourth state, called the 'Turiya'. All these states are represented in the three sounds of 'OM' (i.e. A, U and M) and the silence that follows and surrounds the syllable.

The sound 'A' represents the waking-state; the sound 'U' represents the dream state and the sound 'M' represents the deep sleep state. The waking state is super imposed on the 'A' sound because it is the first of the three states of Consciousness and so is the sound 'A', the very first of the letters of the alphabet, in all languages. The dream is but a view within the mind of the impressions that had reflected on the surface of the mental lake during the waking state. Besides, the dream-state occurs, between the waking and the deep-sleep-state and comes second among the three states of Consciousness. And so, 'U' being next to 'A' in order of sounds, and also the 'M' sound of 'OM' is super imposed, the deep sleep state. The comparison between the last sound of the 'OM' and sleep lies in that it is the closing sound of the syllable, just as deep sleep is the final stage of the mind in rest. A short pregnant silence is inevitable between two successive OM-s' On this silence is super imposed the idea of the "fourth state" known as 'Turiya'. This is the state of Perfect Bliss when the individual Self recognises its identity with the Supreme.

In OM, the sounds A, U, and M are called *Mantras* or forms; there is also in AUM, the common principle called the *Amatra-OM* that which signifies the thing-in-itself, running through and pervading the threefold phenomena of Waking-Dream and Deep-sleep. The law of memory is that the rememberer and the experiencer must be one and the same individual, or else memory is impossible. So, as we can remember all our experiences in all the three different planes, there must necessarily be a single common factor



which was a witness of all the happenings in all the three planes. There must be some Entity within ourselves who is present in the waking world, Who moves and illumines the dream, Who is a distant observer in the deep-sleep world, and yet Who is not conditioned by any of these three realms. This Entity conceived as the fourth state (Turiya), is the Real, the Changeless, the Intelligent Principle.

The syllable 'OM' symbolizes both the spheres: (a) the phenomenal, visible sphere of the '*Jagat*', wherein the manifestations of time and space appear and perish, and (b) the transcendent, timeless sphere of the imperishable Being, which is beyond, yet one with it. Thus 'A' the "Waking-state" 'U', the "Dream" 'M', the "Deep-sleep" and the silence, "Turiya": all the four together comprise the totality of this manifestation of Atman-Brahman as a syllable. Just as the Sound 'M' manifests itself, grows, becomes transformed in its vocal quality and finally subsides into the silence that follows, so too the four 'states' or components, of Being. They are transformations of the one experience, which taken together, constitute the totality of its modes, whether regarded from the microcosmic or from the macrocosmic point of view.

The A and U are as essential to the sound as M, or as the Silence against which the sound appears. Moreover it would be a mistake to say that AUM did not exist while Silence reigned, for it would be still potentially present even in the Silence. The actual manifestation of the syllable on the other hand, is fleeting and evanescent, whereas the Silence abides. The Silence, indeed, is present elsewhere during a local pronunciation of AUM—that is to say (by analogy) transcendently during the creation, manifestation and dissolution of a universe, and is indeed the first



manifestation of Divine Wisdom. This OM is truly symbolic of God.

'OM' thus represents the entire manifested world and the unmanifest and also that which lies beyond both the manifest and the unmanifest—the Brahman, which is the changeless substratum for the changing objects of the world of experiences.

To every mantra 'OM', the Pranava, is added on. And without 'OM' no sacred-chant has its power. Just as living body has no vitality when the life-giving breath is not flowing through its veins, so too a mantra has no life in it without the addition of the Pranava.

Vedantic students generally practise the repetition of and the meditation on the symbol provided by the Pranava—this is called Pranava Upasana.

It may be asked as to why this particular word 'OM' should be chosen as the word representative of the "thought" out of which the universe has become manifested. The answer may be given in Swami Vivekananda's own words.

"This OM is the only possible symbol which covers the whole ground and there is none other like it. The Sphota is the material of all words, yet it is not any definite word in its fully formed state. That is to say, if all the particularities which distinguish one word from another be removed, then what remains will be the Sphota. Therefore, this Sphota is called the Nada-Brahman, the Sound Brahman. Now, every word-symbol intended to express the in-expressible Sphota, will so particularise it that it will no longer be the Sphota. That which particularises it the least and at the same time most approximately expresses

its nature, will be the truest symbol thereof, and this is the OM, and the OM only; because, these three letters A, U, M, pronounced in combination as OM can alone be the generalized symbol of all possible sounds. The letter 'A' is the least differentiate of all sounds. Again, all articulate sounds are produced in the space within the mouth—beginning with the root of the tongue and ending at the lips—the throat-sound is 'A' and 'M' is the last lip-sound, and 'U' exactly represents the rolling forward of the impulse which begins at the root of the tongue, continuing till it ends in the lips"

If properly pronounced, this OM will represent in itself the whole phenomenon of sound production, and no other word can do this, and this therefore, is the fittest symbol of the Sphota, which is the real meaning of the 'OM' and the Sphota, are one and as the Sphota, being the finer side of the manifested universe, is nearer to God.

